THE MILD VIRTUES IN A CHRISTIAN LIFE.

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SERMON

COMMEMORATIVE OF THE LATE

CAROLINE L. WRIGHT,

WIFE OF F. W. WRIGHT, ESQ.

PREACHED IN

THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

AT ASHBY, MASS., FEBRUARY 7, 1864,

BY

JAMES M. BELL.

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BUT THE WISDOM THAT IS FROM ABOVE IS FIRST PURE, THEN PEACEABLE, GENTLE, EASY TO BE ENTREATED, FULL OF MERCY, WITHOUT PARTIALITY, AND WITHOUT HYPOCRISY. — JAS. iii. 17.

WHAT are commonly called the Virtues, may exist apart from a Christian life; but a genuine Christian life will never be found devoid of the Virtues. Another has well stated the distinction: "The practice of moral duties merely from motives of convenience, or from compulsion, or from regard to reputation, is *virtue*, as distinct from *religion*. The practice of moral duties from sincere love to God and his laws, is virtue *and* religion." But like as the diamond that differs from all other precious gems by a brilliance belonging to itself alone, so does Christian virtue differ from the ordinary moralities of life by an excellence that is entirely and always unique.

In the character of a true and growing discipline, there may be found, among other moral excellences, these two classes, the Bold and the Mild virtues: the

former including such qualities as these: Assurance, Courage, Energy, Perseverance. They are a part of the aggressive, demonstrative forces of Christianity. The latter class embrace its tranquil, unobtrusive influences; respecting which, we have in the text a compact grouping of several of them.

"Is first pure," that is, innocent, dovelike; "then peaceable," that is, pacific in disposition, shrinking from strife; "gentle," that is, mild in temper, of tender spirit; "easily entreated," that is, of a yielding nature, not obstinate, docile; "full of mercy and good fruits," that is, very compassionate, and of corresponding habit and manner of life; "without partiality," that is, impartial, disinterested, ready to do good to all. "And without hypocrisy," that is, sincere, not seeming to be what one is not, artless.

All these Christian graces belong to what may be called the mild virtues. Not one of them but what is characterized by a certain gentleness of spirit, which is not a special quality of the bolder virtues.

In briefly unfolding the idea latent in the text, your attention will be directed to *the prominence, place, divinity, and power of the mild virtues in a Christian life.*

The CONSPICUOUSNESS with which these virtues appear in the delineations of that life in the Scriptures, will be seen on a little examination. The teachings of the in-

spired word bear their testimony to it: not, indeed, by always speaking of an entire group of these virtues at once, as the Apostle has done in the text; but more usually by alluding to one or two of them at a time. That favorite passage from the Psalms, "He will beautify the meek," conveys the same lesson respecting the prominence which the mild virtues have in that life which is pleasing in the sight of the Lord, as do the words of Peter, "Even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price." But, probably, the importance attached to these graces in the Scriptures is nowhere so clearly set forth, as in the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. Who are they upon whom the Saviour pronounces his oft-repeated "Blessed"? They are the poor in spirit; they that mourn; the meek; they that hunger after righteousness; the merciful; the pure in heart; the peace-makers. Like the Mount upon which Christ sat, not lofty, but elevated enough to render itself a conspicuous object to the multitude, so these beatitudes of a gentle spirit stand out, as it were, upon the sacred page, not as though towering above all other virtues, but just enough prominent to arrest the attention to their real dignity and importance.

But besides the mere didactic statements of the Scriptures, we have in their examples, still further illustrations of this conspicuousness. In the narrative that

recounts how Miriam and Aaron were on the point of rebelling against the authority of Moses, there occurs, in the form of a parenthesis, this remark: "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth." Few words indeed, but how expressive! Notwithstanding his extraordinary endowments; his more than kingly position; his miraculous intercourse with Deity; and the wonderful deeds of his past history, — Inspiration steps aside, as it were, to inform us that he was a *very meek man!* and if meek, then how patient! how calm! how gentle! Thus, a single word lights up the otherwise stern features of the majestic character of the Hebrew lawgiver, like a gleam of mellow light at sunset the dark sides of a rugged mountain.

How suggestive of the exceeding mildness, carried, perhaps, to an extreme in this instance, of the heart of the warrior King of Israel, is the little incident that occurred, as his followers were going forth to give battle to their countrymen gathered around the standard of his disloyal son.

The royal command — rather entreaty — to his captains is, deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom. And who was Absalom? one that had driven an aged Father into exile from his throne; a son that had usurped that parent's place in the affections of the people, publicly debauched the royal

household, and brought confusion, civil war, and bloodshed upon the realm. And when that son had fallen, and the king had gone up into the chamber over the gate, weeping as he went, and saying, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son,"— the incident no more fully discloses the depth of the paternal affection, than it vividly portrays the exquisite tenderness of David, that made him, what every age since has conceded him to be, Israel's sweetest lyrist.

In the epistle to the Thessalónians, the great Apostle to the Gentiles exhibits, incidentally, the prominence which the mild virtues had obtained in his life. "But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children." Could a more lively image have been employed to picture to us the rare amiableness which the gospel had wrought in the once fierce persecutor of the Christians? Notwithstanding his great learning and powers of reasoning; his fiery Jewish temperament; his fervid and impetuous eloquence; his vast energy and untiring activity, as the first missionary of the Christian church, — he was a gentle man, lovely in all the social and private relations of life.

And to the attainment of the mild virtues, we find him frequently urging his hearers by a reference to a purer and more exalted example than his own. "Now

I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ." He had then, indeed, drank deeply of the spirit of Him who had said, Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, *for I am meek and lowly in heart;* of whom another apostle saith, who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not. Of all the examples of the mild virtues which human or inspired history furnishes us, the example of Christ is alone perfect and absolute.

But the prominence of these graces in the scriptural delineation of the Christian life appears further from the positive command: "Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another." "Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and *harmless* as doves." "Be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men."

Now a real Christian life is founded upon the scriptural representations of that life. So far as that life approximates this representation, so far is it Christian; so far as it diverges therefrom, it is unchristian and worldly. What therefore appears prominent or important in the inspired delineations of that life becomes such, or should, in the actual life of the disciple. We say, should; for the life of no believer, through indwelling infirmity, presents a perfect counterpart to the mild virtues; yet there have been, and

are now, some in whom they have attained a very marked prominence.

While saying this, let us still remember that the constant tendency of that life is towards the possession of these, as of all other Christian graces; that, like the law of vegetable growth that causes the plant to increase both in height and size, till at last it brings forth the blossom and the flower; so there is a law of growth in every real Christian life that steadily impels it onward, not letting it rest, till these blossoms of the mild virtues come forth, more or less abundantly, in the experience.

At the foundation, then, of every real Christian life, there lies the sense of obligation to make the acquisition of the mild virtues one of the ends of believing effort and prayer.

Every true disciple is conscientiously convinced of the importance of being, like his Master, meek and lowly in heart. Not only this, but he is, at times, impressed with the exceeding loveliness of such states or frames of mind. He will also have an impulse to possess himself of these; an impulse that will lead him to put forth the appropriate effort.

And so, to some extent, the life of a progressive Christian will embody, or make apparent to the eyes of others, the lowly dignity and sweet beauty of the mild virtues of the gospel. For grace once sown in

the heart will develop itself into fruits in the experience and life, as certainly as will seed cast into rich mould be quickened and spring up into the blade.

Hence, the presence or absence of this class of virtues in the life, becomes equally a test of character. Are they wholly missing? — then no matter what his profession, or apparent Christian activity, such an one is not a follower of the lowly Jesus. You might as well call a countenance disfigured by the passions of envy and anger — beautiful, as to call an unforgiving, impure, habitually obstinate, irascible professor — a Christian. Then again, these virtues may exist in the germ in one, in whom, from untoward reasons, they are for a time obscured. If so, the least that can be said of his piety is that it is doubtful. But there are others, in whom these virtues are conspicuous and noticeable. Of such we must say what Jesus said of Nathaniel, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.

The prominence of these graces in a Christian life has thus far been dwelt upon at length, in order to lead you to see their real excellence and importance. For these virtues are so unpretending, that, like violets in the field or garden, we are in danger of passing them by without discovering their heavenly beauty and worth, unless the attention is arrested and expressly directed to their contemplation.

Their Place. — But while their prominence cannot be overlooked by any one who studies Christian life in the light of its scriptural delineations, we must beware how we resolve the whole of that life into the mild virtues. What then is the proper *place* of these virtues in that life?

Their place then is not an exclusive one. Though prominent and important, they are not supreme. They cannot take the place of the bolder virtues, when an exhibition of these is needed. Not any one of them, nor all of them combined, can do the work for which unhesitating assurance, unflinching courage, and decisive energy, such traits as the gospel requires, are fitted.

You might as well look for a sky always serene, or for perpetual calmness in the atmosphere, as to expect to see but one aspect to Christian character, and that — the gentle one. Were nothing else but the mild side visible, we should probably perceive it closely allied to effeminacy and inefficiency.

But while not occupying the supreme position, they are not to be regarded as holding an inferior or subordinate one in the true disciple's life. The mild virtues of the gospel should not be lightly esteemed, nor repressed when coming forth, nor depressed to the lowest position either in the conceptions or experience of the disciple. What has been said under the pre-

vious head amply shows this. Gentleness, tenderness, sympathy, are not inconsistent with the possession of the manlier virtues; no more than it was inconsistent for God to have made woman for a meet companion of Adam in Eden. And as God hath ordained that the twain should walk together in life, so hath he ordained that the bold and the mild virtues be inseparably joined in every well-ordered Christian life. The two should, in a sense, enjoy a position of equality.

While then occupying neither an exclusive nor inferior place in a Christian life, it is to be remarked, that the gentle virtues of the gospel sustain to that life *an eminently harmonizing relation.* They produce agreement between all its parts, give to the whole symmetry and completeness. In painting a landscape, after every object has been introduced, and assumed a certain degree of finish, there is a process by which the artist harmonizes all parts of the picture, — the foreground with the middle, and both with the back, — softening all unnecessary harsh lines, and producing in the picture that air of unity and agreement which the eye discovers when looking abroad upon an extensive prospect in nature.

Now what such a process accomplishes for painting, that do the mild virtues for the disciple. Without them, his moral excellences, perhaps marked and great, would appear rimmed with harsh edges, — dis-

jointed, — not leaving a tranquillizing impression upon the mind that contemplates them. What the small spring is to a watch, regulating the evenness of its motions, *that* is gentleness to Christian character. It is the small but necessary regulator of a godly life.

What would a day be without its morning and evening twilight? The eye could not endure — nay, it would be positively pained with — a continuous noonday blaze of light, suddenly breaking forth without warning, and as suddenly quenching itself in darkness. As it is, the day sweetly blends itself into evening, and the evening into night. So the bold virtues of the gospel touch and blend into the mild; and the mild touch and blend into the bold. To see one noted for nothing but Christian zeal, — all ardor, all energy, — unrelieved by none of the milder graces, is an equally painful sight to that one who will not, like Martha, allow himself to be cumbered with many cares, inevitable on "much serving;" but who, like Mary, is sometimes willing to sit at the feet of Jesus, and, in the hour of calmness and solitude, learn of him.

The presence of the gentle graces sustains another important relation to Christian life, — *they impart a receptive state to the soul.*

To be an *easy* recipient of the truth, is one of the most valuable of all Christian frames of mind. This susceptibility is a state, a *habit* of soul. Without it

there can be no progress, either in divine knowledge or in holiness. Now, serenity, mildness, humility, are necessary to teachableness or docility of spirit. One can neither add to his stores of knowledge, nor grow in worth of character, when his mind is in a state of perturbation, self-inflated, or rough and unsympathetic. The great German naturalist, Humboldt, one of the most — perhaps the most — learned of modern minds, was one of the most gentle and serene of men. As the soil broken by the ploughshare easily drinks in the sunshine and rain, and becomes highly fertile under both; so easily does the lowly, gentle soul, unhardened by pride, receive and become fertile under all heavenly influences.

Another, and one of the most important, of the relations which this class of virtues sustain to a Christian life is their *special adaptation to the sphere of Home.* In the noisy places of business, the bolder and graver qualities of character find their field of action. Not that the "still, small voice" of gentleness and charity should never be heard there; it should be whenever the occasion requires. But even when uttered in such places, it is seldom listened to amid the turmoil and confusion. Not till the roar of the whirlwind and earthquake had passed, did the Prophet hear the "still, small voice" of his Lord; — of that Lord of whom David sings, "Thy *gentleness* hath made me great."

Home is the special sphere of these virtues. There arise their most frequent occasions. It is there that the exhibition of them appears in its most attractive forms. To its inmates, they form a perpetual source of cheer and happiness. The household, also, is their genial sphere. Some of these virtues are shy of the worldly gaze; they naturally seek a secluded place for themselves. They seem most conspicuous and lovely when only a husband or children, or a friend is near. So fitting does the household seem for their fullest and sweetest developments, that there are some gentle bearers of the cross who, if drawn into a public sphere of action, would droop and wither, like as the water-lily, when taken from its native element, loses in a few hours its pure whiteness and dewy freshness.

Their Divinity. — Whence do the milder graces of the gospel spring? Are they the product of some inherent power in man? Can he, by a self-determined movement of the soul, evolve them into life? That he can, is both the belief and teaching of some, who are satisfied with referring every virtue of Christian conduct to a no higher than human origin. And, truly, the *apparent* possession of a real amiability and gentleness on the part of many who make no profession of discipleship, gives to this view an air of plausibility.

But, since the religion which Jesus taught requires

that *all* virtue proceed from a supreme desire to please God; that men are to be gentle and forgiving and harmless, because the only begotten Son has left them the heavenly excellence and authority of His example, — it follows that unless this amiability of temper, which seems to be natural with some, resulting in many a kind word and deed, be connected with — rather grow out of — warm love to God, it is a virtue only by the common consent of men, and not by any scriptural or divine right. It has the *appearance* of a gospel grace; in reality it is not such.

The several mild virtues grouped in the text are plainly ascribed to a disposition or state of mind which, while in nature, is not *of* nature. "But the wisdom that is *from above* is first pure, then peaceable, gentle." The wisdom spoken of here refers to a wise ordering of one's Christian life; to a spiritual skill in avoiding error, escaping temptation, or improving every opportunity for religious growth and usefulness. It may also refer to that deep — almost intuitive — insight into the spiritual import of the divine word, which the ripened Christian sometimes manifests. But whether including one or both of these meanings, it is a wisdom pronounced to be "from above." The Apostle sets it in sharp contrast with the wisdom that is natural or earthly; the fruits of which he declares are envying, strife, and like evils. Concerning its source, he ex-

pressly says, "This wisdom descendeth *not from above*, but is earthly, sensual, devilish." The word rendered — sensual could be as correctly translated — natural. It denotes a mind still swayed by the ordinary affections and passions of human nature; one not yet under a special influence from the Holy Spirit.

This wisdom from which flow "the still waters" of a Christian life is not "from above" in the sense that it is of heavenly excellence, or has been taught by One who himself came down from Heaven, or that it must be possessed by a man before being prepared to join the society of the redeemed above. All this is true of it. But this is not the particular sense in which the Apostle uses the words "from above."

They point not to the nature or fitness of these virtues but to their origin. He distinctly implies that their source is divine, not human. Like the pool of Siloam, near to the walls of Jerusalem, — "whose waters flow softly," still, — that takes its rise not from springs bubbling up in its own basin, but from a hidden fountain situated far up under one of the mountain summits of the Holy City, so the milder graces of the gospel have their origin not within the human breast from which their waters gush, but in a Fountain situated far above nature, under the very throne of God.

What this source is, we may clearly learn from another passage of the Scriptures. In his epistle to

the Galatians, Paul teaches that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Nearly the same grouping of the mild virtues occurs here as in the text. Instead, however, of assigning them to a certain state or disposition of mind, as their common source, as James has done, the Apostle directly attributes them to the agency of the Holy Ghost. The two passages complement and explain each other.

The text shows that the gentle graces have such a nature, that only a state of mind which may be called "a wisdom from above" could bring them forth. The passage quoted shows *how* this wisdom comes to a man. It is from above. It is the gift of the Spirit. His agency renews the heart, and starts these principles into action. Otherwise, they would not exist there at all.

This view of the divine origin of these graces is not only a scriptural but it is a rational view. Not that Reason can furnish us independent proofs of its correctness. In matters of doctrine, she helps most when she most clearly illustrates or confirms the truth already revealed.

One fact suggests their divinity. The milder graces of the gospel are not commonly practised by mankind. They are not universal qualities of human character. The sentiment, as well as the practice, of the world

are against them. Pride, power, love of self, are more commonly esteemed and pursued by men than are meekness and compassion. The very word harmless — dovelike — has an offensive odor to a decided worldling. If this class of virtues were natural to men, why do we not see them playing as prominent a part in the history of the race, as the passions of hatred, envy, and revenge? We scarcely need an inspired apostle to tell us what are the works of the "flesh," and what the fruit of the "Spirit." History on every page testifies to the difference taught us in the last of the fifth of Galatians.

Another fact suggests the supernatural origin of these virtues. In the religious systems, and in the philosophies of the world, this class of virtues is almost invariably assigned to the lowest place in the formation of a perfect character. True, there were few of the best of ancient heathen sages, who were so impressed by the exceeding excellence of a meek, forgiving spirit, that they readily attributed its possession to a divine cause. But the exception only proves the rule. The great majority of ancient philosophers, as well as all the Pagan religions of the present day, exalt the natural, selfish qualities of the heart, and hold in disrepute the virtues of peaceableness, humility, and mildness.

A celebrated living tragedian, in a letter to a friend, uses the following language in substance: —

"I am no hypocrite. I hate my enemies; avenge an insult not atoned for; and love them that love me." Not only were the gentle qualities of a Christian character loathed by the haughty spirit of the Star Actor; but it seemed to his philosophy that every one who appeared to practise these virtues played only the part of a hypocrite. Surely, a Divine influence is necessary to exalt these virtues to their proper place in the conceptions of such minds.

Another fact suggests the heavenly origin of this class of virtues. Men experience great difficulty whenever making an effort to attain them.

They meet with no such obstacles, however, in the way of being impure, troublesome, wilful, or unsympathetic.

It is *easy* for men to fall into these habits. But let a rough man *try* to be gentle in speech and manner; a revengeful man try to forgive; an irascible man try to be patient; a close-fisted, covetous man try to be kind and compassionate, — and he will at once encounter the hindrance pointed out in the question of the prophet, — "can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? *then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.*" Not that this hindrance is a physical impossibility. It is simply one of the will. So

habituated are men to the contrary vices, that, left to themselves, they will never practise the milder virtues from the heart.

"Ye *will* not come to me that ye might have life."

Hence, one of the first questions to be asked respecting an exhibition of these virtues in the life is, what is the character of the disposition with which they are allied? Is it natural, or renewed? Is the wisdom self-originated, or heaven-born? Is the *motive* love to Christ, or only a refined love of self?

The state of the heart gives character to these virtues. If that be created anew in Christ Jesus, then we may esteem these virtues as being, what they should invariably be, the milder graces of the *gospel.* If, however, that remains unchanged, then are they, what they are in too many instances, — counterfeits merely, — satisfactory and pleasing to fallen men, but incapable of enduring the searching test of a pure and holy God.

Hence, also, in this thought of the Divine origin, of these milder graces, the Christian has a peculiarly satisfactory test of his own piety.

To an observer, the heart of another lies concealed. When seeing a gentle character, he cannot look into the soul, and see, with the glance of Omniscience, whether it springs from love to God. He can judge of this, only by other fruit borne in the life. But the dis-

ciple may know his own motives. He can say whether he loves God or not.

If naturally of a moody, fretful, censorious temper, he can tell whether love to Christ constrained him to seek to become a pleasant, patient, and charitable man. If naturally of an amiable temper, he can say whether now he continues his habits of gentleness, *as pleasing to Christ.*

But if these virtues can be genuinely practised, only when breathed into life by the Holy Spirit, then will their development in Christian character remind us more and more of the source from which they have sprung. If that development has come forth under severe trial and suffering, extended over a long period of years, it is right to say, — and it almost amounts to a demonstration,— that such unmurmuring acquiescence in the orderings of Providence, and such meekness towards all, are "born of God."

The lineaments of the image of Christ gradually increase in distinctness in such a character. Ask this sufferer for the secret of his unvarying calmness and trust, and, while lamenting that he has not more of the spirit of gentle patience, he will ascribe what portion of it he does possess — not to himself, but to the Spirit that helpeth our infirmities.

We are brought, in the last place, to inquire into the POWER of the mild virtues in the renewed life.

Generally speaking, their power is distinctively a Christian power.

No such influence is exerted by the world; either by its maxims of morality, its false religions, or its proud philosophies. It is an influence that is felt, mainly, by virtue of the quickening and authoritative teachings and examples of the gospel. The gospel alone exalts them to their proper place in a perfect life; reveals their heavenly excellence; and presents such motives as make their attainment both obligatory and desirable.

Besides, it is an influence pervaded by that force which gives to Christianity its supernatural power, and makes it the *only* sin-destructive agency upon the earth, — I mean the personal presence and power of the Holy Ghost. Wherever a gentle character is found, that has drawn its nourishment and derived its beauty from intercourse with Christ, through his word, there we come in contact with the living "workmanship" of the Spirit; and, unless "having eyes but seeing not," we shall perceive its celestial origin, and, by a more than earthly influence, be incited to go and do likewise.

In particular, the power of these milder graces is a silent power.

They accomplish much in a quiet way; like the

hushed flow of a shaded stream, moving along without noise, yet silently carrying mighty fabrics upon its peaceful bosom. They do not make you aware of their power by a rude, boisterous, or wordy manner. Except for their beneficent effects, you would scarcely know that they had an influence. In this respect they resemble the silent power of the sunbeam. All day long, it rushes through the air impinging itself softly upon the eye, and as softly smiting the cold earth. It fills the visual orb with radiant objects of light; while penetrating the soil, it warms into life the seed, and thus becomes one of the principal agencies of Nature in spreading beauty and fertility over the world. And all this is done so gently and noiselessly, that, were it not for its visible effects, we could not say that the sunbeam had power at all.

The mild virtues also exert an unconscious power. Nothing could be farther from a spirit of gentleness than a consciousness of its own importance. The moment this occurs in its experience, it ceases to be a Christian grace and degenerates into an ordinary morality. This remark may apply to all the virtues; it is especially applicable to those we are considering. Nothing so quickly nauseates the mind, as seeing one affecting the deportment and tones of a meek character. True gentleness is the twin-sister of humility.

The innocent, peaceable soul has more goodness than it conceives itself to possess. It is more intent upon showing kindness to others, than in looking for and admiring its own excellences. It has no time, and no inclination, to magnify its own worth.

They exert an even power. It is an influence that affects us, not like puffs of wind, by "fits and starts." It rather resembles the soft but steady breeze of a summer day. We can hardly conceive of a truly gentle character destitute of this evenness of temper, — of this invariability of influence in life. Imagine, if you can, a soul pure, peaceable, gentle, one hour; and irascible, petulant, and unkind the next. It would be a misnomer to call such a person gentle, who was accustomed to such violent changes in temper and conduct.

The power I speak of has the characteristic belonging to all silent, unconscious influences. How steady and uniform in its operations the silent power of gravitation. At all times, in every place, and in every calculation of the forces of mechanics, whether applied to the hurling of a pebble from the hand, or to the grander motions of the starry spheres, we can depend upon its regularity with absolute certainty. How tranquil and even in its diversified workings is the law that governs the growth of plants. Steadily,

silently it works from century to century, till, from the seed and sapling, it lifts immense forests from their earthy bed, and girdles a continent with their leafy belts. Yet, it is an evenness of movement no less apparent in the flower that blooms and withers monthly in your window.

Something like this is the influence that comes from a gentle character.

It draws to-day with the same sweet attraction that it did yesterday. Seldom will you find it ruffled or disturbed; and not seldom much elevated or depressed.

The influence of the mild virtues is one of the most *persuasive* forces of Christianity. We may be thrilled and instructed by the learning and eloquence of an ambassador of the cross; or our laggard souls may be warmed into praise and emulation by the heroic courage and unwearied activity of some gospel pioneer; but these and other striking influences often prove unavailing towards producing a true reformation of the soul, or raising it to a higher plane of Christian feeling and action. A personal act of kindness, unnoticed, — perhaps, unheard of by others, — will sometimes do more than will all other influences combined.

An inquiring, gentle look from his Lord, brought Peter to penitence and tears.

A single word, uttered in a kind, conciliatory tone,

has done what years of preaching have failed to accomplish.

The power of a meek example is wellnigh irresistible. It is this aspect in the Christian character of the missionary of the cross, that so affects the mind of the Pagan with wonder and respect. We cannot live in the society of a gentle, tender character, without unconsciously catching somewhat of its spirit. Even churlish, ill-tempered persons, lose something of their asperity and petulance, when constantly confronted with its meek presence. Such a character also frequently disarms opposition. "A soft answer turneth away wrath." And our Saviour intimates the same truth when he says, "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." And does not the Apostle reflect his Master's spirit? "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head."

Finally, it is an imperishable power. It is not a temporary thing, passing away with the occasion that called it forth. Gentle Abel, though now dead for five thousand years, yet speaks to us by his meek, unresisting character. When sorely beset in the warfare of life, — who is it that the Christian endeavors to place before his weary, fainting mind, to inspire it with renewed strength and zeal, but Him that endured

"such contradiction of sinners against himself;" who was brought *as a lamb* to the slaughter; who, under the most aggravating circumstances, blessed and cursed not.

Things pure and gentle in their nature affect us in this way. Can we ever forget the peaceful sunny days of our childhood? The mild beauty of a serene evening sky, adorned with the silver crescent of the young moon, and a single glittering star, will often arrest the attention of the most unpoetic mind, and be remembered by it many days, even months afterwards. So will the noiseless flow of a deep, broad river, gazed upon for the first time by the traveller.

It is thus that a gentle character affects us. We often muse upon it in moments of respite and rest. The memory of it, long after its living embodiment has crumbled into dust, haunts us in the whirl of business, in all the noise and clamor of the day. It hallows our thoughts and feelings, like the stillness and sacredness of the Sabbath hour.

One, having much of the character dwelt upon in this discourse, has been suddenly called from among us to her eternal home.

Perhaps, there is not another passage in the Scriptures that so appropriately describes the salient points of her Christian character, as the text we have chosen.

It reads as though it were her epitaph. Innocent and inoffensive in her disposition; peaceable, shrinking from strife, as a nerve recoils from pain; sweet and gentle in manner; of a yielding, submissive temper; full of sympathy and compassion; impartial; disinterested in all her efforts to do good; of transparent simplicity and sincerity, — she was a most marked example of the mild virtues of the gospel.

Mrs. Caroline L. Wright was born in Nelson, New Hampshire, January 17, 1823. Her father, Henry Melville, Esq., was an upright, energetic man of business, exerting a great influence in the town and county where he lived. By his industry and skill, he accumulated a handsome property; of which he was liberal in supporting schools, the ordinances of the gospel, and in alleviating the wants of the poor. He came to his death by an injury received three days before, April 3, 1838, aged forty-three years and seven months. His untimely death was mourned by a large circle of friends; and his memory, even now, is cherished with warm affection by not a few living in the vicinity where his useful life was spent.

The subject of this brief memoir was one of five children, left, on the death of their father, to the care of a most excellent and devoted mother. The influences surrounding her early life were of the most favorable

and happy kind. Her father, though not a professedly pious man, always gave to his children much religious instruction; enjoining upon them the careful observance of the Sabbath; while on Sabbath evenings, it was his custom to have them come together for the purpose of reading the Bible, and attending to other duties belonging to such an exercise. He never went so far as to engage in prayer with them on these occasions, though this was his habit when alone with his companion.

Thus, the careful example of revered parents; their deep interest in the moral welfare of their children, — all helped to make deep and lasting this impression upon the youthful mind of Mrs. Wright, *that religion was the one thing needful.*

When about fourteen years of age, she received baptism at the time her mother united with the church, who felt it both a privilege and duty to dedicate her children to God, by having placed upon them that seal of the righteousness of faith, and token of the covenant of grace, which, in obedience to her Saviour's command, she consented should be put upon herself.

Much care and expense were bestowed upon Mrs. Wright's early education. The school privileges of Nelson not being such as were desirable, she was sent away, while still quite young, to attend school in Keene, New Hampshire, and later, to an excellent

school in Greenfield, Massachusetts. Being quick to learn, she made rapid proficiency in her studies, and soon stood high in her class as a scholar. Her memory was so retentive, and the delicacy of her feeling so great, that, even in after life, when many practically forget the rules of grammar and the elegances of speech, she always expressed herself in the best language, and was never known to use a low or vulgar phrase. So cultivated was her taste in such things, that instances are remembered where she has adhered to the correct pronunciation of a single word, even when its incorrect pronunciation was in popular and universal use around her.

From a child she was serious-minded. The Bible was carried with her when first leaving home for school. This precious Book was her daily study; and, it would seem had an elevating and spiritual influence over her heart and life.

She was highly esteemed by her schoolmates and teachers. By her gentleness of manners, her goodness of heart, and purity of life, she attached to herself many very strong and confiding friends.

Mrs. Wright possessed much natural susceptibility to religious impressions; a constitutional tendency so marked, that one would be led to say at the outset, that such a person must become a Christian. "Rarely," one has said of her, — "have I ever known a person

of so much natural loveliness and gentleness; and, in fact, so possessed of all the natural virtues." Yet she perceived and felt her sinfulness; and that, at the hands of a holy God, she deserved no favor on her own account.

In early life, she felt deeply her need of regeneration; and, while away at school in Greenfield, in company with a sister, she indulged the Christian's hope. But being of a very retiring, diffident nature, she did not then make a profession of her faith in an atoning Redeemer.

During her examination, previous to her uniting with this church, — which was in the summer of 1859, — she gave to the Committee the most satisfactory evidence that she truly knew what it was to be born again. To one of the brethren, on her leaving, she said privately: "All my hope is in Christ. Were He to forsake me, I am nothing."

She was led to make a public profession of her faith from a deep sense of duty, awakened by hearing a sermon of her pastor's, on the text, Matt. x. 32, *Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven;* a sermon which, under the Divine blessing, led several others to see the duty they had neglected so long, and to come forward and openly pledge themselves for the Lord and his kingdom. So conscious

was she of having lived in the neglect of her duty, that, during a severe illness just previous to her profession of faith, and which at one time was thought by her physician would prove fatal, her chief unhappiness was occasioned by the reflection that she had not united with the church of her Redeemer when able. "Will the Lord forgive me?" "will the Lord forgive me?" was her repeated and tearful question.

Ought not this little incident to be a warning to some in my presence who are putting off this duty, and who may be as suddenly arrested by the hand of disease or death, when the most bitter drop in their cup will be, that they did not confess Jesus before men, when, by reason of health and opportunity, it was in their power to do so.

Shortly after her recovery, she made that public avowal of Christ which she had resolved to do when on a sick-bed; a step which, to one of her diffident nature, cost much self-denial. Only a deep persuasion of the Master's words — "If ye love me, keep my commandment" — could have induced her to take it.

Long previous to her public confession of faith, she appeared to be in hearty sympathy with all Christians; seeming to wish to identify herself with them rather than with the people of the world, and to engage in such works as might interest them more than those who claimed no lot with the people of the Lord.

The particular type of the religious character developed in Mrs. Wright, was — and I think it will be admitted by all who knew her — characterized by great *sweetness, and tenderness, and simplicity, flowing from a temper of unusual evenness and uniformity.* Said an aged friend: "We have lost one of the excellent of the earth. I have known her for twenty years, and never heard her utter an unkind word." Said still another — not of the family — "I have had occasion to visit the house often; have shared at different times its hospitalities, — yet has she always shown the same unvarying amiability. I have never seen her appear otherwise than as sweet and gentle."

Of her sincerity, one already quoted, has said: "She was evidently perfectly sincere and transparent; never pretending in thought, word, or act — so far as human judgment could tell — to be what she was not in reality."

So strong was her dislike to all pretence and ostentation, that sometimes she shrank from doing and saying what she might have said and done with effect, lest she should seem officious or prominent in any degree. And this leads me to notice her *diffidence* and *humility* of character. She was very unassuming in her manners and conversation. She cherished lowly views of herself. She never allowed another to speak before her, in praise of any good she had done. She did not

readily say much of herself, even to her most intimate friends. She had an instinctive dread of anything that would bring her into public notice. Her happiest moments were experienced when in retirement.

Another salient feature of her character was her great *reverence* for things sacred. Hers was a deep veneration for the Bible, the Sanctuary, the Sabbath, the Ordinances, — especially the sacraments of the gospel and the holy name of God. In a marked manner did this feeling show itself, in the unalloyed pain it gave her to hear sacred things coupled with some witty story, a jest or joke. At such times, she never gave voluntary attention. Her sense of religious propriety, natural with her to some extent, was chastened and deepened by a true, spiritual discernment of, and reverence for, the character and laws of the blessed Creator.

She was of a most *benevolent* disposition ; ever ready to aid in enterprises that had for their object the relief of the poor and needy, or the comfort of the sick and suffering. Often, when others were ready to excuse her from working with them on account of her ill-health, she would not excuse herself. The Sewing Circle in this Church will hereafter, in their accustomed gatherings, miss the gentle presence of one who was for many years a useful and honored member among them. During the last two years of her life,

she was most diligent in her efforts for the promotion of the comfort of our soldiers; sewing for them at home, when illness prevented her from attending the gatherings convened for that object.

I come now to speak of a trait of character, by which, perhaps, she will be the longest remembered by those who knew her best, — her *remarkable patience and resignation.*

Mrs. Wright was a great sufferer. To an intimate friend — not of the family — she once casually said, that there had not been a moment for many years, when she had known entire freedom from pain.

During the last three years, she was a constant and often a severe sufferer; and yet, during all that time, one who enjoyed her society every day, testifies that she never heard her utter an unkind word. She had not learned from her sufferings to excuse herself for petulance by reference to a disordered state of the nerves, or extreme bodily pain. The lesson she had learned was meek and uncomplaining submission. So great was the self-restraint which years of ill health had taught her, that often, for a long time, her sufferings would be concealed even from her own family.

Says one — not yet quoted, and not of the family, "I have known her for twenty years or more; have been in her household at all times; have sometimes had my home there; have seen her in much pain

and suffering, — yet she, at all times, has exhibited a gentleness of disposition, a goodness of heart, and a cheerful, calm trust in her heavenly Father, very rarely to be found among persons situated in similar circumstances. Her health was poor. Disease was at work upon her feeble frame for years. Wearisome days and nights were appointed unto her. Yet she endured all with Christian fortitude and without a murmur."

She bore her sufferings not only with remarkable patience and resignation, but with great *elasticity* and *cheerfulness of spirit*. Doubtless a portion of this was natural to her. She was constitutionally sprightly and cheerful. But her sprightliness was also permeated by Christian hopefulness. It certainly was wonderful that she could suffer so much, — hardly a day for three years passing when she did not feel miserable, and yet be so uncomplaining, "so sweetly cheerful, so lively even." Nor did her sufferings prevent her from taking a cheerful view of things around her. Bodily pain renders some, even good Christians, depressed and gloomy. Nothing around them seems to go on well. If evils impend, they are magnified through the lens of their sufferings into proportions unnatural and frightful. With her it was far different. Though in constant pain herself, she was the first to see "silver lining edging the darkest cloud," — the first to speak words of hope and cheer.

I will close this sketch of her religious character in the language of another: "Mrs. Wright did not say all that, perhaps, she might have said for her dear Saviour. But she certainly did *live* for him. She did love him. She did long to be, in her heart and life, more like Christ. The whole influence of her life and example, and manners and demeanor; the spirit and temper of her intercourse with her family and all others, — all this spoke for Christ in unmistakable and unceasing tones."

Mrs. Wright was a woman of superior natural intelligence and refinement. Her judgment upon matters of taste and culture was sound and valuable. She was an affectionate wife and mother. The happiness of her family was her constant care. Efficiently and quietly she moved about her house, looking diligently to the interests of each of its members. She was a warm and steadfast friend. Her place in the prayer meeting and in the church was never vacant except when she was hindered from attending by extreme ill-health. Often she has worshipped with us, while enduring sufferings that would have kept others less conscientious at home.

Most unexpectedly has she been taken from us. On Wednesday, December 30, she attended, as usual, to the morning duties of her household. In the afternoon, while plying her diligent needle, she was sud-

denly attacked by pain of uncommon severity, which speedily prostrated her on a bed, from which she never again arose. Able medical counsel was at once summoned; but her condition was pronounced hopeless. On Sunday she was visited by her pastor. Though able to recognize, she was unable to converse with him, owing to the excessive pain which the effort produced. But her look was serene; and the pressure of her hand betokened no dread of "the inevitable hour." Remembering how signally she had recovered from an illness which had brought her to the verge of the grave, some five years before, an importunate prayer was likewise offered on this occasion for her restoration to health, if not inconsistent with the benignant and holy purposes of the Almighty. But her "appointed time" had come, and it was not possible that the cup should pass from her. On Monday her agony was extreme; but it is hoped that to much of the pain she was insensible. She continued to sink, gradually becoming more and more unsconscious, till at a quarter before eleven in the night, and six days after the first attack, her spirit took its flight to God who gave it. She has passed from the pain and sorrow of earth, to the repose and peace of heaven. And as we bid her a long Farewell, — our loss of whom is now her gain, — we must say of her as it was said of her Master, "Made perfect through suffering."

Now that she has gone from us, we see and feel more than ever, how much Christ wrought for her; how inward and real a thing religion is; and how valuable beyond all computation, is the silent, steadfast influence of a sincere Christian life.

To this church, of which she was a meek and consistent member; to all who enjoyed her acquaintance or friendship; especially, to him who feels her loss more deeply than words can describe, and to the son who can never forget a mother's love and care, — let me commend for prayerful imitation, the lowly trust, the unmurmuring patience, the sweet resignation, the unassuming but persuasive piety, of the Gentle Departed.

Sister, thou wast mild and lovely,
  Gentle as the summer breeze,
Pleasant as the air of evening,
  When it floats among the trees.

Peaceful be thy silent slumber, —
  Peaceful in the grave so low;
Thou no more wilt join our number;
  Thou no more our songs shalt know.

Yet again we hope to meet thee,
  When she day of life is fled;
Then in Heaven with joy to greet thee,
Where no farewell tear is shed.